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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies key variables in both the design and implementation of educational planning models and presents a conceptual framework that meaningfully relates these variables. Purpose of the conceptual framework is to provide educational researchers and practitioners with a "cognitive map" of significant variables associated with educational planning. The framework was first developed on the basis of an extensive review of the literature and then validated and refined on the basis of data collected from over 75 school districts involved in systematic planning efforts. The framework is organized around three categories of variables, including techniques and methodologies, process variables, and local application variables. Basically, the framework attempts to focus attention on three questions about a planning model: (1) What are the specific techniques and methodologies of the model? (2) How does the model gain legitimacy and effectiveness in the school system? and (3) How is the model adapted and used in the school system?
(Author/JG)

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EDUCATIONAL PLANNING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

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EDUCATIONAL PLANNING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

In recent years a great deal of attention has been focused upon planning in education. A rather impressive amount of literature has emerged describing and generally advocating one or another planning model and certain of these models have been attempted in educational settings with varying degrees of success.

At least one major stumbling block to effective implementation of a planning model has been the lack of understanding as to how a system moves from the written description of the planning model (the design phase) to the actual behavior in making the model work. Too little attention has been given to the very complex set of behaviors involved in closing the gap between design and implementation.

In a study of educational planning[1] the present authors attempted to identify the key variables in both the design and implementation of a planning model and then through a conceptual framework show how these variables could meaningfully be related. The purpose of the framework was to provide researchers and practitioners with a "cognitive map" of significant variables associated with educational planning.

An original, hypothetical framework was first developed on the basis of an extensive review of the literature. Guided by this framework, data were collected from over 75 school districts which had been identified as involved in a systematic approach to planning. Also, in-depth case studies were written on four school districts, each of which was attempting to implement an identifiably different planning model.[2]

The original framework was relatively adequate in examining the more specific methodologies and techniques of planning models (more associated with the design phase). However, the data from the survey and the case studies strongly suggested the need to include variables which focus upon the organizational and political nature of planning (associated with implementation). The data also pointed to the need to examine the variety of ways local school districts apply the planning process. Variables needed to be included to help understand the institutionally idiosyncratic nature of planning, which often appeared to modify the "pure" planning model found in the literature. This modification was found to be due, in large measure, to administrative style and operation, the tasks to be performed, and the setting in which planning took place.

The Conceptual Framework

The original framework was refined to incorporate the missing variables and in its final form is organized around three basic categories:

1. Techniques and Methodologies
2. Process Variables
3. Local Application Variables

The Conceptual Framework -- An Outline

(1) Techniques and Methodologies

--Scope of Participation
--Target Time
--Range of Context
--Resource Allocation
--Involvement Techniques
--Initial Organization
--Points of Intervention
--Consultant's Role
--Locus of Responsibility
--Target Groups
--Data Generation

} What are the specific techniques and methodologies of the planning approach?

(2) Process Variables

--Initiation
--Pattern of Involvement
--Commitment - (a) General Commitment to Planning
(b) Commitment to the Specific Planning Approach
(c) Commitment to Participate
--Interface Relationships
--Communication and Coordination
--Leadership and Risk-Taking
--Decision-Making Process

} How does the planning approach gain and retain legitimacy and effectiveness in the school system?

(3) Local Application Variables

--Mode[3] (a) Design-Process
(b) Solution-Implementation
(c) Descriptive
--Political Behavior
--Planning and Change

} How is the planning approach actually used in the school system?

Explanation of Variables in the Framework

1. Techniques and Methodologies

This category of variables focuses upon specific techniques and methodologies of planning models. The variables are characteristics basic to planning and are often prescribed in specific ways in the literature dealing with planning models. Regardless of the degree of prescription, each school system observed has to deal with the following variables.

SCOPE OF PARTICIPATION:

Individuals and/or groups participating in the planning process, or the population from which they are drawn.

TARGET TIME:

The length of the time into the future which is planned, e.g., very short range (day-by-day decision), short range (1-2 years), medium range (3-4 years), long range (5 years or more).

RANGE OF CONTEXT:

What is to be affected by the planning, e.g., total system vs. subsystem; total curriculum vs. mathematics curriculum.

This variable could be considered a continuum from piecemeal to completely integrated, system-wide planning.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION:

Time and funds allocated for the process of planning, including the source and the amount.

INVOLVEMENT TECHNIQUES:

Techniques used by local system and/or consultants to gain the involvement of individuals and/or groups in the planning process.

INITIAL ORGANIZATION:

Steps taken and apparatus set up in the local system prior to the actual planning in order to facilitate the process, e.g., selecting participants, creating committee systems, providing training sessions.

POINTS OF INTERVENTION:

Points along the planning process continuum when interventions of some kind are crucial to keep the planning process moving.

CONSULTANT'S ROLE:

The role of the outside individuals and/or agency in initiating, implementing, and giving character to planning process, including funding.

LOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY:

Identification of the highest level within the organization responsible for planning.

TARGET GROUP(S):

The identification of the people who are to be affected by the developed plans, e.g., certain groups of students, parents, teachers, etc.

DATA GENERATION:

Sources and processes used in the generation of data and the use made of the data as part of the decision-making process in planning.

The above items provide a convenient checklist for comparing planning models in general, and for understanding adaptations made in local systems. The items did discriminate among planning models and local school districts included in our study. They helped to provide a partial inderstanding of the mode and direction of planning.

2. Process Variables

This category of variables focuses upon several processes which are key variables as local school districts attempt to implement and sustain systematic planning. It deals mainly with the organizational and political environment within which local planning must take place. The variables deal with the factors involved in gaining and retaining legitimacy and effectiveness in the local school system, and give another dimension to the more static items listed in the first category.

INITIATION:

This includes the source of stimulus for beginning systematic planning (the person, group or agency which initiates the process) and the role of the initiator(s).

PATTERN OF INVOLVEMENT:

The sequence and intensity of involvement of individuals and groups after the point of initiation.

COMMITMENT:

Three types of commitment are identifiable:

(a) General Commitment to Planning---this refers to the means by which a commitment is gained to the need for the planning, and to the level of commitment actually attained by participants in the system.

(b) Commitment to the Specific Planning Approach---this refers to the means by which commitment is gained to the specific procedures, processes, and demands of a specific planning model (e.g., PPBS, MBO), and to the level of commitment actually attained by participants in the systems.

(c) Commitment to Participate---this refers to the means by which commitment is gained from relevant people to actively participate in planning activities and to the level of commitment actually attained by participants in the system.

INTERFACE RELATIONSHIPS:

The planning process brings together diverse groups and works to achieve cooperation among them. The concept "interface" is based upon the idea of territoriality and in the socio-political differences which exist in subgroups of complex systems (e.g., teacher unions and parent groups). Interface issues are often conflict-laden and arise as distinct groups attempt (or are forced) to develop a working relationship--or interface--with other groups.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION:

Formal planning usually entails the formation of new groups and committees, new participants, an increased flow

of information and, in general, more organizational complexity. This variable focuses upon the processes used to provide for the needed communication and coordination during planning.

LEADERSHIP AND RISK-TAKING:

Achieving change involves certain risk-taking behavior on the part of leaders. The type of leadership and the degree to which risk-taking behavior is characteristic of the planning effort is included in this item.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN PLANNING:

Operationally and ideally, planning entails organizing for, making, and carrying out decisions concerning the future of a system. The decision-making process in a systematic planning model may alter or reinforce the typical or traditional decision-making process of the system. New loci of power may form or the status quo may prevail. This item focuses attention upon the decision-making process during planning, and on power and influence within the system, and the interrelationships of these with the planning process.

3. Local Application

There is inherent in every local setting certain idiosyncratic factors which influence the mode by which the planning model and the process variables may be applied. These include local politics, values, customs, beliefs, ideologies, etc. Data from the study confirmed the three different modes of planning identified by Kaufman:[4]

MODE:

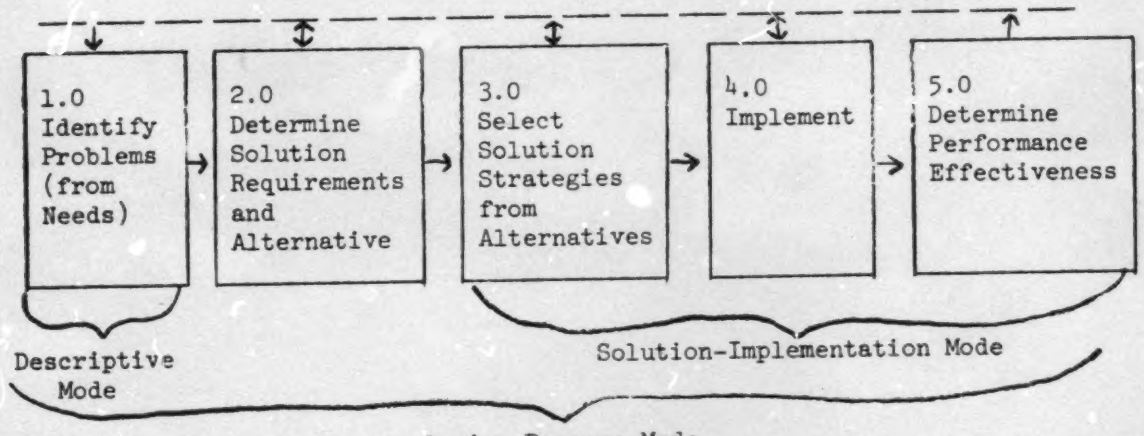
(a) Design-Process Mode---assumes little or nothing about

the validity of the ongoing system and is a complete approach, from needs assessment through implementation and evaluation of plans. This approach is the idealized form of planning found in much of the literature and includes the setting of priorities for the system. It also suggests continuous planning and feedback as opposed to periodic and/or crisis planning.

(b) Solution-Implementation Mode---is concerned with the identification and implementation of solutions, and assumes a valid need exists or that the ongoing goals and objectives of the system need not be considered or altered.

(c) Descriptive Mode---emphasis is upon simply describing the existing and/or desired system, but not on alternative solutions or on implementation of plans. Whether by design or not, schools following this mode to the exclusion of the others give the appearance of having "bogged down" in verbiage (a not uncommon mode for many of the districts included in our study).

Kaufman related these three modes to the steps in the planning process. Schematically, he showed the relationship as follows:[5]



POLITICAL BEHAVIOR:

An important recurring theme in the analysis of the case studies concerns the political behavior of the participants (individuals and/or group) in the planning process. To a very large degree, it was this behavior that determined and defined the local application of the planning process (i.e., modified the planning process to fit the socio-syncratic characteristics of the local school district). This item recognized planning processes as political resources which are acted upon and used by participants. At least two types of political behavior are identifiable:

1. Influencing - emphasis is upon applying pressure tactics to maintain or alter certain aspects of the planning model (e.g., any or all of the variables listed under Techniques and Methodologies). The intensity of this style is measured by the personal or group stake in the results of planning.

2. Controlling - seeks to control the planning process itself and utilize it as a political resource for select individuals or groups who seek to create conditions a) to centralize or decentralize decision making, b) to reinforce the status quo or to foster gradual or sudden change, and c) to create new goals or define old ones more clearly. Factors which define this item include control of information, initiation of new ideas, composition of planning groups and the locus of the final decisions in the planning process.

PLANNING AND CHANGE:

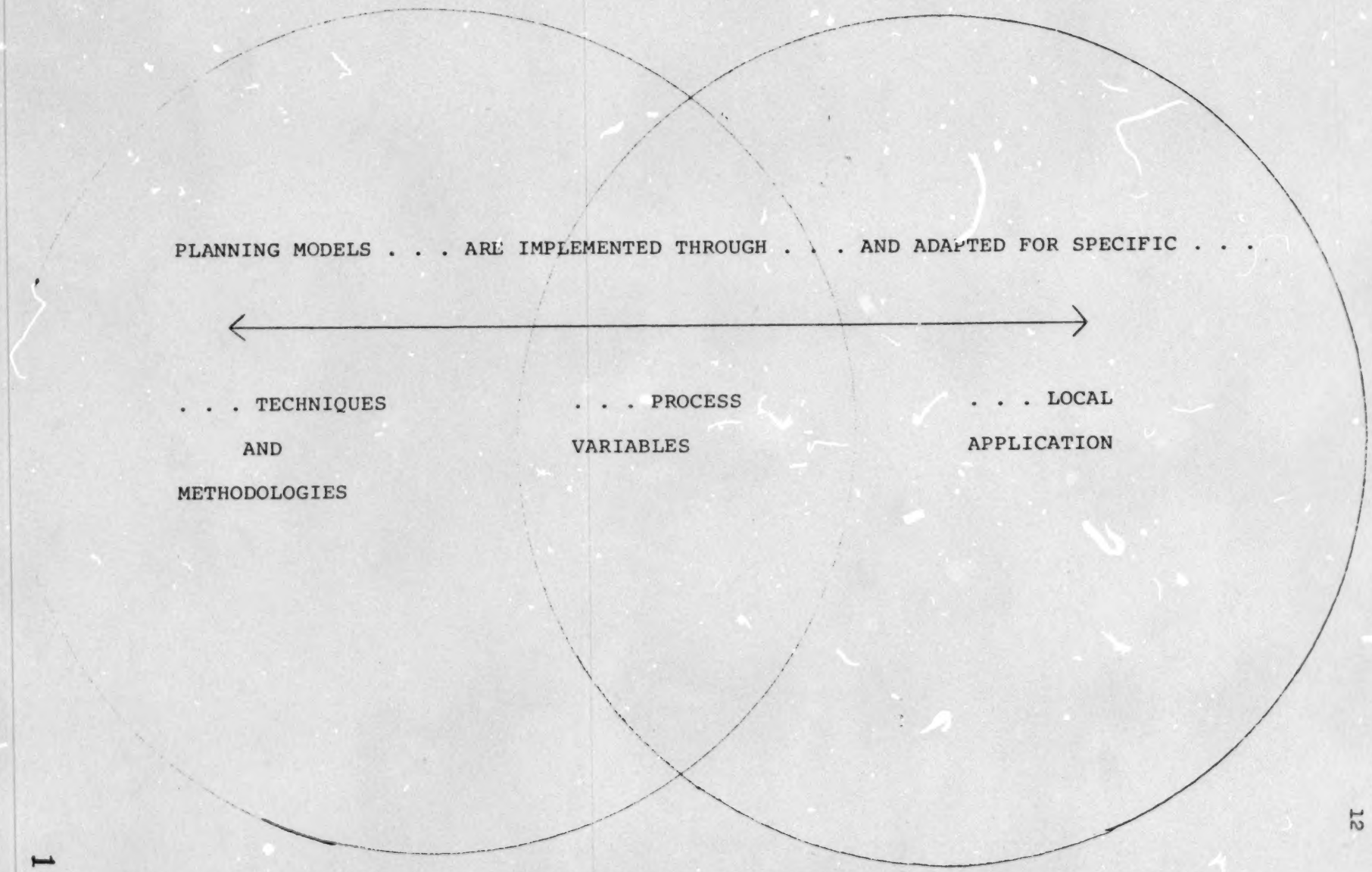
> A great deal of activity can go on in a system which can be called "planning" without actual change taking place. Planning can functionally be used to preserve the status quo and ensure its preservation into the future. Planning can also be a tool for bringing about change. This variable focuses attention on the actual change (or lack of it) as a result of planning and suggests that the local use of planning can be, but need not be, change oriented.

Planning involves acting upon values in order to create a desired system in the future. The rather bland and technical language of much of the literature on planning not withstanding, the actual use and local application of a planning model will vary greatly. The mode of planning, political behavior, and degree of change are all variables which have influence upon and will be influenced by the model of planning and the process variables.

The Relationship of the Three Categories

The above three categories are related. In effect, planning techniques and methodologies are implemented through process variables and adapted for specific local application. Put another way, the local environment of the school system and the nature of the process variables cause adaptations in the techniques and methodologies of planning.

The relationship is shown schematically below.


PLANNING MODELS . . . ARE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH . . . AND ADAPTED FOR SPECIFIC . . .
. . . TECHNIQUES AND METHODOLOGIES
. . . PROCESS VARIABLES
. . . LOCAL APPLICATION

SCHEMATIC OF RELATIONSHIP AMONG THREE PLANNING CATEGORIES

This framework suggests then that seldom is there a "pure" planning model in operation in a school system. Instead, the planning model is modified by the process variables and local application. In the process of gaining and retaining legitimacy and effectiveness within a system, the "pure" planning model is modified and sometimes drastically changed.

Applying the Conceptual Framework and Research Propositions

The emerging literature on educational planning has concentrated to a very large degree upon describing the techniques, procedures and methodologies of given planning models. While such descriptions may serve as useful guides to educators, they do not account for the very complex variables that cause the same planning model (e.g., PPBS) to be expressed differently in each of the settings utilizing it. Neither do these descriptions deal with the complex variables that are involved in spelling the difference between success or failure in the planning process.

A major weakness of this literature is that it is atheoretical in nature and almost devoid of research findings which will yield meaningful insights into the viability of given planning models. It devotes very little attention to relating conceptually the social, political, economic and organizational variables, which individually and through interaction determine the nature and scope of planning at the school district level.

The conceptual framework described in the present article is derived from a recently completed study of educational planning. In brief, the framework suggests a dependent, reciprocal relationship

among three categories of variables; methodologies and techniques, process, and local application. Each category is influenced by and in turn defines the other. A "pure" planning model is modified by process and local application resulting in a planning configuration that is socio-syncratic to the setting in which it takes place.

A basic advantage of this framework is that it provides a means for viewing the dynamic inter-relationship among three categories of variables which are relevant to the planning process. It also provides the basis for suggesting certain researchable propositions about educational planning.

The following propositions, selected from a large number as examples, are based on research using the framework by the present authors:

Proposition 1: Educational planning is an activity initiated by the chief administrative officer of a given system. The chief administrative officer plays the key role in initiation in local systems by (a) active leadership and/or (b) legitimation.

Proposition 2: Systematic educational planning is initiated by cosmopolitan superintendents who have strong formal and informal links to regional, state and federal agencies and organizations.

Proposition 3: The initiation of local planning is related to external stimuli, especially (a) the availability of external sources of funding, (b) the geographic proximity of external agencies which are attempting to induce local planning, and (c) the climate and inducements set by state departments of education.

Proposition 4: Interventions are needed to keep a planning process from "bogging down" and to give continued direction to the process. Such interventions are not usually built into planning models and must be developed locally.

Proposition 5: Inherent in educational planning models is the mandate for the greater involvement of participants.

Proposition 6: Educational planning processes are political resources and will be used to reinforce the values and goals of those who control them.

Proposition 7: Planning models include decision making processes which are open, rational, and based on collected data. These processes may be used in attempts either to reinforce or change the customary decision-making process in a school district.

Proposition 8: The decision-making process in educational planning will become a political issue when (a) planning is conducted on controversial topics, and/or (b) there is a lack of local consensus on goals, and/or (c) the customary decision-making process of a school district is changed by the planning process.

Proposition 9: The most serious problems faced by school leaders in developing systematic local planning are "people-related" rather than related to the techniques and methodologies of planning. The most serious problems are (a) gaining commitment of participants in the system to the need for planning, (b) gaining their commitment to and active participation in the specific processes used, (c) finding and allocating the necessary time for planning to take place, and (d) dealing with interface issues which arise as diverse groups come together to plan.

Proposition 10: External consultants are usually involved in the initiation and implementation of local educational planning. Besides training participants in the process, they often influence the level of expectation of participants toward planning and the style of planning (e.g., amount of participation).

Proposition 11: The "pure" planning models found in the literature are modified when translated to the local setting. The character of local process variables and adaptations made for local application more strongly influence success and direction of planning than the specific model used.

Conclusion

Systematic planning is an activity growing in popularity and importance. At present, a research base is missing. Most of the literature is generally atheoretical, concentrating upon the description of one or another model.

The greatest gap in the literature involves the issues relating to the implementation and continuation of planning in a local setting. The movement from the written description of a planning model to its actual use in a school system involves a complex set of behaviors. It also involves modifications and adaptations made locally which invariably change the "pure" planning as found in the literature.

The variables presented in the present article were found to be significant factors in the planning process as local systems attempted to use planning models. The conceptual framework relates to the three categories of variables. The framework should help the practitioner and researcher focus upon the process by which a planning model is implemented and adapted locally. The framework and its variables suggest researchable propositions, an important first step in building the needed research base for planning. Hopefully, the framework will also focus more attention on the process and local application variables, rather than the current, almost exclusive emphasis on the techniques and methodologies of planning.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Samuel Goldman and William J. Moynihan, Developing a Conceptual Framework of Viewing Educational Planning, Final Report, Project No. 2B036, Contract No. OEG-2-2-2B036, Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, June 1974.

[2]The four planning models were, Program, Planning, Budgeting System; Community Participation Model, Organizational Development Model, and the American Management Association Planning Model.

[3]Roger A. Kaufman, "System Approaches to Education: Discussion and Attempted Integration," in Social and Technological Change: Implications for Education, edited by Philip K. Piele, et. al. (Eugene, Oregon: Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, University of Oregon, 1970), pp. 121-188.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid., p. 160.